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William Winston Pettus

Sermon preached in All Saints-by-the-Sea

Montecito, California

Sunday, November 25, 1945

The Rev. John DeForest Pettus, Rector

On Friday evening, I received word that my brother had been killed. Since he has been very much on my mind, and since many of you have supported his work, I want to tell you something about him.

Win was outstanding in many fields. He always won scholastic distinction. In college he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi. In medical school, he won the corresponding honor, Alpha Omega Alpha. When he took his National Boards, ht stood second in the country.

In athletics, he had a broad ability. He played on a number of class teams, and organized a graduate school league that is still going. He won a swimming award

for general well-rounded ability which is won by very few members of Yale's famous swimming team itself.

Win was an accomplished violinist, and was always interested in musical instruments. He taught himself to play the piano and a variety of Occidental and Oriental instruments. He sang for several years on the Yale choir, and was particularly fond of quartets. Wherever he went, there was soon a group singing, even if Win had to teach each man his part by ear. He himself would sing any part that was not filled. I have no doubt that he is already adding the "Whiffenpoof Song" or some other favorite to the repertoire of the Seraphims. I mention all these abilities, not merely because they were personal attributes, but also because they are very common on the mission field.

Win had a great gift for friendship. He was one of whom it could truly be said that he had no enemies. When he returned to this country on a freighter in 1943, acting as ship's surgeon, the crew gathered an offering for his work. Whereever he went, he found mutual friendships almost immediately, and thereby he often telescoped long processes of red tape. Someone was always there to assist him. When the Japanese entered Changsha in 1940 and commandeered the hospital's store of rice, he made the Japanese officer see that the rice was too "inferior" for Japanese troops.

One never worried about Win, because he always landed on his feet. Crossing Siberia as a boy of seventeen, he shared a compartment with a Russian Jew. For some reason each coveted the other's berth and they effected a swap, but Win exacted extra payment. When he had a few days to spare at Calcutta, he ran up to Darjeeling for the view of Kinchinjunga, the second highest mountain in the world. It is a superb view on the very few clear days in the year, and no one was surprised when it was clear for Win. At Changsha shells passed over his head and exploded in the next house. Even typhus could not kill him.

His chosen field was surgery. He brought to it both

his unusual powers of concentration and self- discipline, and his interest in people. The first two summers in medical school he was health officer at a boys' camp. The third summer, he served a short residency at the Gallinger Hospital in Wasington, with graduate doctors actually working under him. He had planned a long period of graduate work at the Presbyterian Hosital in New York, but responded to an emergency call for a doctor in Changsha in 1940. Following the Japanese attack, his operating schedule for days on end was from eight in the morning until two the following morning. He described it as "playing God," to have to decide which patients would be served, which could wait, which were beyond care and must be left to die because of the press of work.

It was in evacuating before a Japanese advance that he waded through a rice field and picked up a very rare liver fluke, which invalided him home in 1943. His attitude toward this disease was always detached and scientific and he kept careful clinical reports on his progress.

At Changsha, Win was Professor of Surgery at Hunan-Yale Medical School. It was a key position in China's drive to treble the numbers of doctors within ten years, and he was always looking for ways to further the work. His faith was deep and seldom mentioned. He was always unhurried and unruffled, though full of enthusiasm. It was entirely in keeping that he should have utilized his enforced stay in America to learn to fly, so that his field of activity and his usefulness might be enlarged. He had just bought a small plane from the American Army for ambulance work, and was flying it to Changsha, when he was killed in a crash.

So at thirty-three, there ends a life of rare promise. He was one of the gifted few who, being richly blessed, richly shared their blessings. It is one of those events for which there is no apparent reason. He was desperately needed here, and we can only assume that God

has more important work for him. It brings to mind that many another young man of great promise has gone before his time, but not been lost. Larry Thurston had only a brief ministry, but all the work of Yale-in-China stems from him. Arthur Mann had only a year at Shanghai, but that was the year in which Bishop Tsu decided to enter the ministry. And there was One other whose thirty-three years have marked all of history.

Win had achieved more than most men twice his age. He had a vitality so vibrant that it was felt even when he was on the other side of the world. It is something which continues and cannot be killed. His going makes so much clearer the fact that death is of the body, but life is of the spirit. It makes heaven more real, as if we had a beach-head in eternity.

This is a time to thank God for Christ's revelations of eternal life, for the Church's formulae of faith in immortality. Often what we say and sing in Church are words learned by rote, but at such a time as this they come alive and we see the value of our preparation in things which before were beyond our understanding.

This is a time to thank God for His revelation in one whom we know, for a life invested in so many lives that it is bound to bear much fruit. Win has departed this life, but he lived so fully that we cannot mourn his passing. He had given to the world the melodies and harmonies which were in him. He had kept the faith. "The Lord *gave,* and the *Lord* hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."